

The People of Alor

144 Before going into detail about the nature of the Atimelang village complex, a few comments should be made on the physical type of its inhabitants. No generalizations are possible for the island as a whole. The Atimelangers are predominantly Oceanic Negroids although naturally strains of Oceanic Mongoloid blood may be detected. In any event, they cannot be thought of in terms of Indonesian populations.

147 Their physical composition has been studied by Dr. Brouwer,* and it is in part on his description that the next few statements are based. The average stature of males is about five feet one inch, that of females between four feet nine and four feet ten inches. Hair varies from wavy to kinky, skin color from light bronze to black, and red pigmentation in hair and skin is detectable in many individuals. Noses are short and of medium width, heads are long, and faces are often pentagonal. A combination of features and stature suggests a pygmoid strain in many individuals.

161 There is no conclusive evidence that the population of Alor is increasing, although the government tax list shows an augmentation of about ten thousand in the last decade. It is quite probable that this represents only better census taking, not a true increase. But certainly the population is not decreasing; my own rather inadequate statistics from Atimelang indicate that four children per woman grow to adulthood.

● 163 This is more than enough to maintain the population level, despite a mortality rate of 48 per cent before adolescence. The excellent health 164 program instituted by the government has probably reduced the death rate; certainly smallpox epidemics no longer sweep the island as they once did. At present the most common diseases are dysenteries, respiratory infections, malaria, and yaws. The last, though seldom fatal, is extremely common in Atimelang, and few children escape the devastating skin lesions of its first stage. The possible effect on personality of these debilitating diseases, often suffered in acute form during childhood, is worth bearing in mind.

361 Atimelang is often called the Five Village district. It lies in large 162 part within the valley described above and has a relatively dense population. Within a radius of about one mile there are some six hundred people scattered among four major villages and their offspring hamlets. On the eastern side of the valley lies Atimelang and its two hamlets of Folsfeng and Faramasang, with a total population of approximately 180 inhabitants. Closely allied to Atimelang by intermarriage is Lawatika, the fifth village of the complex, with about 100 people. Its population is scattered through three hamlets lying on the difficult slopes of the

*D. Brouwer, *Bijdrage tot de antropologie der Alor-eilanden* (Amsterdam, n.d.).

Adolescence, Marriage, and Sex

97

This quantitative statement becomes slightly more meaningful when broken down as follows:

	Males	Females	
Number of cases examined.....	112	140	162
Adults who have never married.....	14	0	536
Adults who have at some time contracted a marriage.....	98	140	589
Contemporary widows and widowers.....	3	35	
Additional wives.....		35	
Married adults who have never been divorced....	99	93	
Divorces among those remaining.....	99	47	

Some of the significant facts apparent from these figures are that there are twenty-eight more women than men in the community. This indicates a higher mortality among men since out of 108 recorded births the sex ratio was 1 to 1. However, despite the surplus of women, because of plural marriages, there are no women who have never married; whereas, because of the financial difficulties of men in contracting marriages, there are fourteen men who have not. Parenthetically it should be noted that of these fourteen all but one are young and still hope to contract marriages. Women seem to be definitely at an advantage in the matter of acquiring a spouse.

In marriages, however, the expectancy of women to lose a spouse through death is higher than for men. On the other hand, the expectancy of rejecting or being rejected by a spouse is one to three for women, whereas it is one to two for men. In other words, these figures suggest that men are less secure than women in terms of the voluntary dissolution of marriage. Might this, in conjunction with other factors, mean that men feel emotionally less secure in marriage?

One more comment should be made concerning these figures. They probably understate the actual expectancy of broken marriages, since despite repeated checking there were undoubtedly instances that were forgotten by the several informants consulted. Furthermore, many of the adults listed were still young and had not yet run their full course of marital readjustments.

If the diagnosis of personality formation so far has been correct, the marital relationships here described are not surprising. Most men are searching for a mother-provider whom experience has taught them they are unlikely to find and toward whom, therefore, they feel much latent hostility. On the other hand, the women have had little in their own childhood experiences to give the stability and security men seek to find in them. Quite apart from such genetic explanations, which are only probable, there is little question that once again a descriptive linkage exists between sex, wealth, and food.